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844 851 footpath through the bush leading from the road to the beach, and led by Maerabit, they yelled loudly, announcing their approach. As soon as they arrived, they filed into the house where the new baby was lying. In many little ways they showed their affection and joy in the new child, patting him and "crowing" over him. The infant's mother was not with him, but was in the cook-house preparing taro, and her mother was with the baby.

844 851 431 The women filed out of the house, and in their usual nonchalant manner sat on the ground waiting for the distribution of food. Murri, the infant's mother's brother, was master of ceremonies, and stood by the pile of coconuts and made a short speech, saying that these coconuts and taro were for the new infant, that this was only a small distribution of food, but that later they would have a much bigger feast. He was then assisted by the matrilineal grandfather of the infant in the distribution of the food to the women, who had all brought coconuts to the feast, and thus contributed as well as received them. First, each woman was given four coconuts, which was regarded as a new gift, then she received a large pile which was considered as a return gift for those she contributed. Each woman fills her [482] basket with the taro and coconuts. They all walk home together, with the baskets on their backs.[1]

844 Women of the opposite moiety have celebrated the arrival of a new member to the community by playfully fighting each other for months before he arrived and on the day of his birth. He was ushered into the world in feminine company; his grandmother and other women of his hamlet were

[251] [1] Usually, at this feast, some of the taro has been prepared in a special way months in advance. The inside is scooped out and it is baked and hung up on the ceiling of the house to dry for many months. The resulting taro is hard and brittle, quite different from the ordinary baked taro and is considered a delicacy. The few who know this method usually begin preparations as soon as they hear of a pregnancy, and long before the actual birth.

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244 crop. The men mark the ground where the taro is to be planted with long, pointed sticks, then the women (usually a woman and her daughter) make holes in the ground, also with a pointed bamboo stick, and one taro stalk or cutting is put in each hole, the earth about the hole being patted down with the stick. The whole garden is planted in this fashion. Sometimes a woman will allow a couple of other women to plant in her garden. In this case small plots are allotted to them and the boundary of each marked by bamboo poles. It may be that one woman is waiting while her husband clears ground for a new garden. In return, the woman will usually give some baked taro to the husband of the woman owner of the garden. Women sometimes assist [476] each other in the garden work. Pulong works frequently in the garden of Maralis, her sister-in-law, and Maralis returns the service by working in Pulong's garden. It takes about ten months before the crop of taro is ready to be harvested. In the interim the women weed the ground and pull out any extra shoots, so that all the strength goes into the remaining one.

244 When the crop is ready to be harvested the taro is dug up
251 by the women with the same pointed stick they used in the preliminary operations. The outer layer of dirt is scraped off the taro, which is then piled in the baskets and carried home by the women. If it is not for immediate consumption, i.e. if it is to be kept a day or two in anticipation of a feast, it is hung on poles stretched between trees, or placed on long benches constructed of bamboo poles for this purpose. The hanging on poles is the more usual way.

244 After a crop has been harvested, the land lies fallow for from six to ten years.

A man and his wife will usually have several gardens at one time. While the woman works in one, her husband will be clearing ground for a new one next to it, and

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on the edge of a sharp-pointed stick into a kind of trough, made of the hollowed branch of a coconut tree. The result is as if the taro was put through a coarse meat-grinder. Then the taro is kneaded or worked with the hands and mixed with water and shredded coconut, as if it were a batter. Two layers of long leaves are laid on the ground, shredded coconut put on them, and on top of that the well-kneaded batter patted smooth with the *tsip* (shell). It is the men who do the wrapping in the leaves. When the bundle is ready it is baked in the *liga*.

The coconut for this or any other taro may be shredded by either men or women.[1] The outside skin of the coconut is removed, and it is cut in half and the liquid drunk or used to sprinkle over taro. The half coconut is then rubbed on a pointed stick, the shredded coconut falling into a trough in which the lower end of the pointed stick rests.

Another method is to lay the scraped taro, halved, on banana leaves, sprinkle shredded coconut over it, with a little water; put another layer of taro, coconut, and water, and so on for several layers. The whole is then wrapped in leaves, tied with vine, and baked in the *liga*.

A specially prepared taro is called *Rota*, and is used at birth rites and sometimes at mortuary rites, when it has been prepared in advance. The inside of the taro is scooped out, and the resulting baked taro is very hard and brittle. It is hung up in the house to dry and kept there for many months, and it appears to last indefinitely. Not all women know how to prepare it, and the few who are skilled at it are known for this skill and acquire prestige from it. Everyone will tell you that Kuta knows how to prepare the *Rota*, and when she mentions it there is pride in her voice.

Another way of preparing the taro is to mix it with the

[1] Taro is never scraped by men. They do not know how to do it, and it is unheard of for any of them to attempt it. This is one of the few absolutely rigid customs.